

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 12, 1903, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. (On envelope: Letter from Mabel A.G.B.) 1331 Conn. Ave., May 12, 1903. My darling Alec:

I feel so very unhappy about this Geographic Society business. I haven't dared to say anything to you, just because I have felt so strongly and been so miserable about it.

You and I have been on opposite sides of questions before and have each felt very strongly and but deep in my inmost heart I have felt that your side was the higher more ideal one, and that when people came to write of you they would say you were really in the right, although mine was the more expedient, more immediately wise in a worldly way. Until now, that is, now, it seems to me I am on the higher more ideal, more really honorable side, and I don't like it, I would rather feel that you were really in the right. But I don't, I know you mean to do right, that your feeling is, that you think you are doing what you ought to. But I don't and can't, I have been over it again and again and it seems to me like this, that you found your father-in-law's ship that was the pride of his heart, to the building of which he gave the best of the last years of his life, in danger of wrecking, because he had suddenly had to leave it before he could make it safe. You were not the proper captain, you had not been trained as seaman, but you could not stand by and see your father-in-law's creation go to pieces without trying to save it. So you stepped forward and guided it, you saved it from instant destruction, although you were not a trained seaman, you saved it and there was no one else who could have done it. There were trained seamen in plenty, but none to save the ship. For years you have carried it through stormy waters, you have added to it and changed it according to your own ideas. Very nearly now you have brought it into safe anchorage, very nearly it is so staunch that no ordinary storm can touch it, very nearly, not quite. The anchorage is in sight, but not

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reached, there is troubled water between it and the harbor, and now just at this moment you will leave it, leave it without guidance, without any strong hand at the helm. And why? Because you do not hold a master seaman's certificate, and there are other stately ships bearing down on you, and you think the captains of those ships will say you oughtn't to be there because you are not a trained captain. As though it mattered whether a man has a captain's license or not, if he has brought his ship through storms no other captain could have weathered.

Alec dear, it seems to me as if this time you were putting your own private feeling and regard for your own personal feeling above the higher call of fulfilling this duty that lies right to your hand.

Alec dear, Papa loved this Society as you love your kites and flying machines. He worked as long and hard on perfecting it as you have on your problems. Wouldn't it seem hard to you if you had to die and leave them and to have Bert refuse to go on and perfect them if he could "because he isn't really a scientific man." Don't you think I would feel horribly if I had to stand by and see all your work of years going for almost nothing, not because no one could save it, but because Bert's regard for his own reputation, for 3 what other men would think about his not being a bonafide true blue scientific man, wouldn't allow him to go ahead and finish your work as he could do if he chose. This is just how Mamma feels, and I feel so badly that it spoils all my comfort with her.

I recognize perfectly well your position, and I would no longer urge your remaining as President of the Society if there were any one ready to step into your place and guide it safely. But you know there isn't just now. Mr. Foster the nearest approach won't take it now. Greely or McGee or Gannett would just ruin the Society.

I know you've been very very good and sacrificed your own inclinations for the good of the S S o ciety, and I wouldn't mind so much now if it were not for Mamma. You say often, "Your dear Mamma I love her so much, I wish I could do something for her," and here

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is the one thing you can do for her. She is so tired and lonely and troubled now, and she feels as if you would destroy her husband's work if you were to let it go just now. Alec dear, at least go and talk to her and show her that it will be all right and you won't allow Papa's last work to go to pieces from any inconsiderate action on your part. Alec — I do love my Mother, and we owe her and Papa so much, don't let's hurt her so terribly as I know she feels now. Why I think it would just break my heart if Bert should refuse to carry on your work to completion if he could, and you were dead and couldn't. Oh, the helplessness of the dead, and the women they leave behind them.

Your loving wife.

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P.S. Alec my dear darling, I do love you, and I don't want to urge anything distasteful on you. I want you to be free to follow your own inclinations, but my Mother, Alec, my little Mother, she is nearing the end, and she can't wait to see things come right. I do so want her last days to be happy and full of love and gratitude to you . I will do my best for your Father, do your best for my Mother.

She has said nothing to me, nothing, but her silence cuts all the deeper, at least do nothing without talking to her and making her feel it is all right.